

THE U.S. COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY:  
ADDRESSING RADICAL IDEOLOGIES

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by

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## ABSTRACT

THE U.S. COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY: ADDRESSING RADICAL IDEOLOGIES by Major Barbara P. Benson, 85 pages.

This thesis examines the U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy and National Security Strategy in regards to combating adversaries driven by radical ideologies. This study focuses on Al-Qaeda and The Islamic State's strategic campaigns to propagate their radical Islamist ideology and the spread of violent extremism. This study will evaluate the adequacy of the U.S. counterterrorism strategy in combating radicalization; will analyze the effectiveness and legitimacy of preemptive and preventive approaches to countering terrorist and implications on society.

There is little understanding of radicalization. Al-Qaeda and its affiliates subscribe to jihadism, an Islamic extremist ideology, to incite violent attacks against American targets. Violence and terrorism are the foundation of Islamic extremists and serve to unify and legitimize their movement. This study suggests that while the U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy addresses radicalization, it does not provide an institutionalized mechanism to prevent violent extremism.

The U.S. government needs to re-evaluate the application of hard and soft power when combating terrorists fueled by radical ideologies. Additionally, the U.S. law enforcement agencies need to cooperate in maintaining a balance between civil liberties and public safety to avoid undermining community outreach efforts to counter violent radicalization and terrorism.

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## ACRONYMS

ASALA	The Armenian Army for the Secret Liberation of Armenia
CRCL	Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
CT	Counterterrorism
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DNI	Director of National Intelligence
DOJ	Department of Justice
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FISA	Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act
GTD	Global Terrorism Database
GWOT	Global War on Terrorism
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham
JCAG	Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide
JP	Joint Publication
JTTF	Joint Terrorism Task Force
NCTC	National Counterterrorism Center
NSS	National Security Strategy
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
RAF	Red Army Faction
RCT	Rational Choice Theory
SIP	Strategic Implementation Plan



START	The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism
VE	Violent Extremism
VEO	Violent Extremist Organizations
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the United States, then, as in the Near and Middle East, the reality or perception of oppression has led to paranoia. When two sides become ideologically straitjacketed, they can no longer listen to each other. And from there it is a short step to being unable to tolerate each other's existence.

— Karen Armstrong

#### Overview

In an era of rapid technological advancement, adversaries rise to challenge America's hegemonic power, not only in economic, space, and cyberspace environments, but also through ideologies that oppose traditional American culture. One of the major adversarial ideologies that pose a significant threat is the violent extremism found within the tenets of radical Islamism, also referred to as Jihadism. In the 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR), General Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff states,

Our ability to project forces to combat terrorism in places as far away as Yemen, Afghanistan, and Mali—and to build capacity to help partners counter terrorism and counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD)—reduces the likelihood that these [Jihadist] threats could find their way to U.S. shores.

While General Dempsey's remarks reflect the decrease in threats against the American homeland, the growing strength of this ideology in the Middle East and Africa continues to threaten national interests abroad, growing, and expanding in scope and extremist action.

The existence and potent capability propagated by extremist thought serves as a very real threat. On September 11, 2001 (9/11), Al-Qaeda and its operatives challenged the world order, attacking the United States homeland. Within a week, the U.S. declared

the War on Terror. Despite the previous attack on the World Trade in 1993 and the bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995, the magnitude and scale of the 9/11 attacks were unanticipated. The events of 9/11 changed the paradigm of the intelligence and security environments shaped by policy-makers and political leaders. The attacks on 9/11 also changed the American public's perceptions of the threat, a 'new' threat with no conventional armies, no advanced weaponry or technology, and no state flag responsible for the most devastating attack against the most powerful nation in the world since December 7, 1941. Al-Qaeda, as an organization, made itself known that day as a new transnational, non-state actor, terrorist group and demonstrated its capability to plan, support, and executes attacks against the United States. The miscommunications, which had occurred within the intelligence community, and the actual events, which transpired on 9/11, triggered the restructuring of the U.S. National Security Council (George and Rishikof 2011, 24-27). This restructuring created new security and intelligence institutions as a means to better facilitate collection and proactively respond to terrorism (George and Rishikof 2011, 24-27).

Since 9/11, the U.S. National Security Council and Homeland Security, among other agencies, restructured in the attempt to better understand and deter terrorist threats. Similarly, al-Qaeda and its affiliates morphed into a larger, decentralized network with transnational reach and influence throughout the Middle East, Africa, Europe, the Philippines, Asia, and Canada (Gunaratna 2003, 18). Al-Qaeda gave rise to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), although no longer affiliated. ISIL is aggressively ambitious and displays a willingness to use brutal and inhumane tactics to achieve its ends. ISIL shocked the world last year as their brutal crimes, violent acts, and savagery

terrorized the streets and towns of Syria and Iraq. The group's violent extremist tactics and gruesome acts monopolized the media during the first months of their invasion of Iraq. ISIL and al-Qaeda affiliates continue to take advantage of the media coverage to spread their ideological views throughout the international community (Salman and Winter 2014, 13).

The international community recognized ISIL's successful use of social media and technology to recruit foreign fighters, increasing the threat of "homegrown" terrorism. The 2011 National Strategy for Counterterrorism and most recently the 2015 National Security Strategy classify violent Islamist extremism, also referred to as Salafi-Jihadists, as a high threat to U.S. National security: "the network that poses the most direct and significant threat to the United States—Al-Qaida, its affiliates and its adherents" (White House 2011a, 11).

Radical Islamist extremism poses a threat to U.S. and other Western societies by propagating a radical Islamic ideology where Islam and democracy do not coexist. Al-Qaeda and its affiliates recruit Westerners to fight in Islamist insurgencies and turn Western Muslims and converts into "foreign fighters" (Klausen et al. 2014, 7-9) by providing a "theological justification and a larger narrative of global struggle" (Rollins 2011, 8). In addition to funneling Western fighters to fight in sectarian wars in Syria and Iraq, Islamist extremists groups promote homegrown terrorism in the West and within American soil. Homegrown Islamist terrorist plots increased since 2008 and the introduction of social media provided terrorist a platform to propagate their ideology (Klausen et al. 2014, 6).

Al-Qaeda and its affiliates pose a substantial threat to the U.S. homeland despite the number of successful U.S. operations in taking out its leadership. The threat that Al-Qaeda poses today is the radical Islamist narrative which is more resilient than its leadership. Al-Qaeda's ideological influence in the United States is evident by the number of radicalized individuals traveling to Syria and Iraq to join the Islamist insurgencies, the number of arrests related to al-Qaeda inspired terrorist attacks like the Tsarnaev brothers (2013 Boston Marathon bombing) and Major Nidal Hasan (2009 Fort Hood shooting). Therefore, today's CT Challenge is the recruitment and radicalization of Americans to join al-Qaeda's Salafi-Jihadist movement that aims to undermine democracy and American civil liberties in the name of radical Islamist ideologies. In order to effectively deal with this threat, the U.S. government and law enforcement officials must properly identify and understand the root cause and related factors that compel people to adopt radical ideologies and turn to acts of terrorism.

The purpose of this thesis is to study the relationship between radical ideologies and terrorism and the U.S. government's approach to violent Islamist extremists and affiliated movements. This inquiry serves as the primary research question and addresses if and how the current national counterterrorism (CT) strategic adequately engages individuals holding radical ideologies. Therefore, this study intends to analyze the effectiveness of the U.S. strategic approach to radical ideologies by comparing the "Global War on Terror" as a preemptive approach to confronting terrorism based on Rational Choice Theory and the current U.S. CT strategy based on the Social Movement Theory against and the capabilities of radical Islamic groups such as al-Qaeda and the number of attacks since 9/11 these groups have made.

### Research Questions

The primary research question of this thesis is “Does the U.S. Counterterrorism (CT) Strategy effectively address adversaries driven by radical ideologies such as Jihadists ideologies for the future?” In answering this question, the intended purpose is to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the CT strategy in combating violent Islamist extremist groups such as al-Qaeda and affiliated movements. The secondary research questions are:

1. What is the U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy?
2. What are radical ideologies? What fuels / causes the appeal of this radicalism?
3. Who are the adversaries driven by these ideologies?
4. What are the challenges/threats of the future from these adversaries?

Research in this study focuses on the causes of terrorism, radicalization process and the U.S. approach to violent Islamist extremism. This study utilizes a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology to assess the operations and activities of radical and violent Islamist organizations demonstrated during the conflicts from the last decade.

### Definitions

The definition of terrorism is vague and highly challenged because, as the common saying goes, “one’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter.” Consequently, what constitutes a terrorist act may differ between societies depending on political, ideological, or cultural perspectives. To ensure consistency, this study will use and apply a number of key operational terms throughout this study as defined below:



Counterterrorism. “Activities and operations taken to neutralize terrorists, their organizations, and networks to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals” (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, vii).

Homegrown. “A terrorist activity or plots planned within the United States or abroad by American citizens or legal permanent residents radicalized within the United States” (Bjelopera 2013, 1).

Strategy: The process of achieving objectives (ends) through the purposeful application (ways) of available resources (means) while accounting for risk (Yarger 2006). “The focus of strategy is on how the ends, ways, and means interact synergistically with the strategic environment to produce the desired effect” (Yarger 2006). Simply put, strategy is how an organization achieves its goals with their available resources within their unique operating environment. Strategies are therefore unique to the organization and the environment.

Violent Extremists. Are individuals or groups that “support or commit ideologically-motivated violence to further political goals” (US Department of Homeland Security 2015).

This study will use the following Islamic terms throughout this study as defined below:

Caliphate. “A jurisdiction governed by Muslim civil and religious leader known as a caliph” (Bjelopera 2013, 1).

Hakmiyyah. A theological understanding of Allah’s ultimate sovereignty over political, social and economic affairs (International Crisis Group 2005).

Islamist Extremism. This term refers to violent extremist organizations designated by the U.S. and the international community, as terrorist organizations. Islamist Extremism is often times interchangeable with revolutionary Islamism (Gaub 2014, 2-3).

Jahiliyyah. A state of ignorance, un-Islamic behavior (International Crisis Group 2005).

Jihad. “Internal struggle against evil; the way an individual can become a better Muslim; can also mean a call to holy war against non-Muslims” (Rashid 2002, 265).

Jihadist. An individual involved in jihad; “radicalized individual using Islam as an ideology and religious justification for their belief in the establishment of a global caliphate” (Bjelopera 2013, 1).

Salafi-Jihadist. Sunni militants; It is also a radical Islamist belief that society should be governed by Islamic law based on the Quran and adhere to the model of the immediate followers and companions of the Prophet Muhammad, and the will to conduct violent acts to achieve their goal” (Bjelopera 2013, 5).

Sharia. A collection of moral codes based on a broad and diverse set of Muslim scholarly opinions practiced according to personal preference and spirituality. Islamists interpret sharia as state law based on fundamental principles of Islam as written in the Quran and the hadith of The Prophet Muhammad (Readings, Brandon, and Phelps 2010, 267).

### Assumptions

This study has two primary assumptions supporting the research. The first assumption is that radical ideologies such as Islamic extremists pose a threat to U.S. interests. Positioning conventional force of the U.S. military against decentralized

extremist groups creates conflict as these groups resort to terrorist acts in order to achieve their objectives.

The second assumption made is that radical Islamist and extremist groups such as al-Qaeda and affiliates consider the West and the United States as enemies. Al-Qaeda and its affiliates are part of the militant strand of the “radical Islamist movement” known as Salafi-Jihadist (Gunaratna 2003, 112). Al-Qaeda, its affiliates and other like-minded groups and individuals consider violent jihad an individual responsibility.

A third assumption made is that al-Qaeda and affiliates propagate a violent Islamic extremist ideology to recruit foreign fighters and promote terrorism to achieve their political and religious objectives.

A final assumption made is that some people in America are susceptible to radicalization and recruitment. Therefore, understanding the root cause of terrorism and radicalization is key to the effectiveness of any CT strategy.

### Limitations and Delimitations

This research study includes a number of limitations and delimitations. First, while numerous radical groups exist, not all of them are violent nor Islamic. However, Muslims using radical Islamist extremist ideology as their justification have conducted the majority of terrorist attacks against the U.S. in the past thirty years. Therefore, this study will focus on al-Qaeda and its affiliates. This report does not examine all Islamist groups. As a result, the scope of the thesis will be on the aspects of Islamism, Salafi-Jihadist ideology, relevant to terrorism.

The information cutoff date for research material will be 31 March 2015. In addition, this thesis will utilize unclassified sources only, taken primarily from open

source information. Classified and for official information only sources will not be used in the conduct of the research.

### Significance of the Study

Salafi-Jihadist groups are groups commonly associated as groups focused in reviving or renewing Islam, These groups reject any form of international law and seek to establish a global Muslim community. Al-Qaeda and affiliates are examples of violent extremist groups motivated by Salafi-Jihadist ideologies. These organizations encourage people from around the world to turn to Islam, join their ranks, and join the fight against Western oppression. Al-Qaeda encourages all people to execute attacks around the world by employing jihadist tactics, utilizing terror to cripple their enemies. The result of ISIL and al-Qaeda's successful ability to spread their message and leverage social media is an increase of Westerners flying to Syria and Iraq to join the Islamic insurgency, and an increase of homegrown terrorists' attacks in Western countries.

### Summary and Conclusions

This research will review the relationship between radical ideologies and terrorism. The study will examine the current U.S. National Security and Counterterrorism approach to al-Qaeda to address the primary research question: "Does the U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy effectively address adversaries driven by radical ideologies such as Jihadists ideologies for the future? Chapter 2 will consist of a review of the collected literature on the topic of terrorism, radicalization and a brief description of U.S. response to terrorism since 9/11. Chapter 3 will provide the methodology used for the research project. Chapter 4 will present the analysis of the data collected from selected case studies to determine the effect of the current U.S. approach to al-Qaeda.

Finally, chapter 5 discusses the conclusions of the study and provides recommendations for further research.

This chapter outlined the objective and structure of the thesis. The objective of this thesis is to assess the effectiveness of the U.S. National Security and Counterterrorism Strategy in regards to addressing adversaries who are motivated by radical ideologies. Chapter 2, Literature Review, will provide a review of the theories of terrorism, and an examination of the relationship between radical ideologies and terrorism. The literature review will conclude with a brief description of the evolution of the U.S. response to terrorism.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to answer the primary research question: “Does the current U.S. Counterterrorism (CT) Strategy effectively address adversaries driven by radical ideologies such as Jihadists ideologies for the future?” The primary assumption for this study is that radical ideologies promote participation and support to terrorist organizations, countering radical ideologies will reduce the populations’ willingness to join or support terrorist organizations.

Recently President Barack Obama stated that we are not at war with Islam (U.S. White House 2015). In contrast, President Ronald Reagan and every president after have had to deal with terrorist attacks conducted by “Muslims who claim jihad as their justification and avoided condemnation of Islam in the context of terrorism” (Gorka 2014, 4). Al-Qaeda, since the attacks on 9/11 (2001), expanded its operational reach from South Asia through the Middle East and into Africa and throughout the world. President Barack Obama’s Administration recognizes the potential threat to the U.S. homeland and interests overseas from al-Qaeda and other violent extremist organizations. In the 2015 *National Security Strategy*, President Obama states, “We will focus on countering extreme and dangerous ideologies” (U.S. White House 2015, 4).

To answer the primary research question, “Does the U.S. Counterterrorism (CT) Strategy effectively address adversaries driven by radical ideologies such as Jihadists ideologies for the future?” first it is necessary to understand the role of radical ideologies regarding terrorism.

This literature review begins with the history and brief description of the different theories and causes of terrorism. Next, it will examine the reasons why individuals turn from radicalization to terrorism. Then, it will examine the threat of radical ideologies to the U.S. domestic security and international interests. Finally, this literature review will provide a brief evolution of the current U.S. CT strategy.

### Terrorism and History of its Meaning

Terrorism is a widely contested and controversial concept amongst social and political scientists, government and law enforcement officials, and the international community. Terrorism experts, Walter Laqueur, Bruce Hoffman, David Rapoport, Martha Crenshaw, Alex Schmidt, and Brian Jenkins, believe that defining terrorism is difficult if not impossible largely due to its evolution over time and the number of diverse and subjective variables associated with the term. The study and definition of terrorism encompasses diverse and subjective variables such as shared similarities between violent criminality and warfare, differences in political, ideological, and cultural motives, and the nature of the perpetrators of terrorism—state and non-state actors.

Terrorism is difficult to define because its definition changes based on time and the cultural context of an individual's perspective. For example, "one person's terrorist can be another's freedom fighter" is a common phrase used to illustrate the complexity in defining terrorism. As with most things, the meaning of the word has changed over time. The meaning and usage of the term terrorism has changed through time to reflect the political vernacular of the time (Hoffman 2006, 40). During the French Revolution, terrorism "in its original context, was closely associated with the ideals of virtue and democracy" (Hoffman 2006, 3). Maximillien Robespierre readily used terror tactics to

legitimize the new revolutionary government's power. Robespierre, in an effort to consolidate power and eradicate dissent, aggressively attacked those he viewed as a threat against him and sentenced them to death by guillotine, instilling fear in the population and preventing future opposition (Hoffman 2006, 3). Just as the European conservatives of the day considered Robespierre's actions extreme, today terrorism carries a negative connotation as the definition and usage of terrorism is subjective and dependent on the public's political perspective. Considered a threat to social order and national security, the U.S. government stands negatively opposed to terrorism of any kind as a means to forward the political action of non-state actors.

### Characterization of Terrorism

Political scientists often regard terrorism as a means to achieving a political end state. However, just as no one definition of terrorism exists due to the subjective perspective regarding the acts themselves, neither does a single universal framework exist to contextualize and categorize the types of terrorism. As such, political scientists categorize terrorism in several ways, defining categorizations based on demographics, motivations, scale of operations, level of organizational end state, or the personal motivations associated with the groups conducting terrorist activities.

Rapoport describes terrorism as four waves: anarchism, anti-colonialism, left wing radicalism, and religious terrorism. Specifically regarding the terrorist activities of violent Islamist extremism that Rapoport defines as religious terrorism, the author suggests that this type divides into three waves as defined by the demographic population attracted to terrorist activity. Rapoport defines the first wave as consisting of upper middle class Afghans fighting against the Soviets. Inspired by the first wave, the second



wave consists of actions conducted in Bosnia, Chechnya, the Philippines, and Kashmir. The demographic, consisting of younger, well-educated, and solidly middle class men, fought to redress perceived grievances within respective regional areas against governments viewed as oppressive. However, the second wave culminated, ending with the bombing of the Twin Towers on 9/11. Rapoport considers the third wave currently underway. Inspired by al-Qaeda actions in Iraq, leaderless, young children of immigrants or members of the lower middle class, commit acts of domestic terrorism and petty crime to earn prestige and money to fund personal expenses. Rapoport's assertions regarding the motivations of this third wave terrorism reflects valuable insight in the self-radicalization of a population which may feel marginalized and forced to act as a means for social acceptance (Sageman 2008, 32, 48-50, 62-3, 71).

Dr. Bruce Hoffman, however, defines terrorism based on the motivation and scope of the group, describing three categories: international, political, and religious. Hoffman explains his ideas regarding international terrorism using the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as his model. Described as a non-state actor possessing a political agenda, a centralized strategy, and operations conducted at the behest of a central leadership figure or body, Hoffman highlights an international terrorist organization's ability to network and serve as an actor within national interests. Political terrorist groups are those groups arising during the post-colonial era that reflect the emergence of radical political thought within a self-determined citizenry. In his definition of religious terrorist groups, Hoffman suggests that religious terrorism directly corresponds to the desire to return to religious fundamentalism (Hoffman 2006, 80, 84, 90).

While political scientists may disagree on a single standard of characterization, the measures by which these authors use to describe different terrorist groups serve to identify grouped commonalities. These commonalities assist in establishing a shared or similar identity amongst the various groups operating to achieve their respective end states. The identification of these common characteristics may assist in identifying means with which to combat these terrorist groups.

### Understanding the Root Causes of Terrorism

There are no standard profiles of a typical terrorist, much less a standardized definition of terrorism, there are different theories social scientists use to identify and understand the root causes of terrorism. These theories range between the study of individuals to studies of social networks in the role of recruiting or participating in terrorism-related activities. Martha Crenshaw applies Rational Choice Theory (RCT) to study and explain the reasons why individuals or groups turn to terrorism. The RCT argues that terrorism is a rational and calculated strategic decision taken by rational actors to achieve a political goal (Crenshaw 2008, 26). Crenshaw suggests that groups or individuals with extremist ideologies resort to terrorism when there is either an imbalance of power or a structural government changes within a state. (Crenshaw 2008, 26). For example, ISIL took advantage of the power vacuum in Iraq to expand their area of operations and influence.

Marc Sageman illustrates the significance of group dynamics in the transformation of individuals from radicalization to violent extremism. He explains that group interactions, strong social bonds and friendships within a group can motivate individuals to commit to radical ideologies and to commit violent terror attacks.

Sageman's research supports the theories that, "The shared nature of his experience is consistent with the finding that social bonds came before ideological commitment" (Sageman 2008, 17). Sageman proposes, based on his research studies and observations, that individuals become terrorists through a four-stage radicalization process. The process initiates with an experience of moral outrage that is later framed within a narrative of oppression he or she internalizes. The final stage of radicalization is the bonding with like-minded individuals who provide validation and a sense of belonging within the group (Sageman 2008, 84).

Social Movement Theory (SMT) provides a framework "to understand the origins and consequences of collective mobilization" (Gorka 2014, 7). SMT is a perspective that originated in 1800s in the socialist labor movements. SMT views the world through a bipartisan lens and sees the world divided between the "have" and the "have-nots," a world where the fight for equality and justice "cannot be found in the compromises of party politics but in the triumph of one over the other" (Gorka 2014, 7). SMT explains radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism as extreme expressions of legitimate grievances. SMT paradigm attributes terrorism and violent extremist acts to legitimate grievances, poor socioeconomic conditions, oppressive states and violations of human rights and civil liberties. Similarly, to the RCT, SMT is useful in identifying and predicting behaviors but "dismisses the idea and beliefs that inspire terrorists to act" (Gorka 2014, 11).

The importance of understanding the root causes of terrorism serves the ability to develop adequate strategies to counter it or defeat terrorist organizations that pose a threat to national security. Like the definition of the term *Terrorism*, there is no universal

profile or individual characteristics that can identify or predict the next terrorist. However, there are a few motivators that seem to be present in the findings and conclusions of many studies. These commonalities are poor socioeconomic conditions, personal grievances, social mobilization, and radical ideologies. For the purpose of answering the primary question, this study focuses mostly on radical ideologies.

### Radicalism

As with terrorism, radicalization is a subjective term. Radicalism is the manifestation of strong feelings and beliefs in support for a particular issue (McCauley and Moskalenko 2014, 70). Therefore, violent extremism is the manifestation of strong feelings in behavior. It is important to note that having radical views does not necessarily mean that the individual is or will become a terrorist.

Other scholars and policymakers believe that radicalization or extremism as a process is a collective action driven by the political, social, and economic environment (Gorka 2014, 10). Scholars base this belief on the Social Movement Theory (SMT) that “seeks to understand the origins and consequences of collective mobilization” (Gorka 2014, 7). Scholars base this belief on the idea that terrorism is the response to negative circumstances and failed or oppressive states (Wiktorowicz 2004, 4).

Research studies on the sociology and psychology of terrorists show that radicalization is the result of a combination of individual and communal circumstances. According to Sageman, terrorists are intelligent and charismatic individuals that embrace radical ideologies that resonate with their own personal grievances and see violence as a rational means to achieve their goals (Sageman 2008).

The U.S. CT Strategy does not define how and why people turn to violent Islamist extremism, but identified radicalization is one of the root causes of terrorism. The US government firmly believes that preventing and disrupting radicalization is the key to countering the spread of terrorism. The success of a counter radicalization strategy depends on identifying the root causes of radicalization, as well as understanding the underlying conditions and proximate drivers that motivate people to radicalization.

### Radicalization Process

Multiple theories exist within the government and academic circles about the importance of the underlying, direct, and indirect drivers of radicalization. Most scholars believe that radicalization is inherently personal and individually unique process. Social science research posits that radicalization results “from a search for meaning and for a new start, for some it appears to result from a search for community. For a few accomplished and resourceful individuals, “radicalization appears to be more of a conscious intellectual process driven by ideology, religion and political grievances” (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010, 810).

“Radicalization is a dynamic, inherently personal process that entails a unique combination of environmental strains, ideology, and motivations, and process of socialization” (Huffman 2011, 7). Individual radicalization is dependent on the belief system of ‘us vs. them’ or intergroup conflict. Individuals respond to perceived threats to the social or religious group they belong. Radicalization involves a combination of environmental conditions, ideology, personal motivations, and socialization or assimilation process.

Some analysts assess radicalization is due to having endured discrimination or family difficulties, bearing depression or suicidal tendencies, or possessing a sense of adventurism. However, studies are not conclusive on directly linking radicalization to terrorism because of the limited data available. One thing that is apparently clear throughout all the studies of terrorists is that there is no psychopathology that contributes to a person resorting to terrorist acts. Individuals that choose terrorism are people who appear normal, and do not stand out. Research shows that no single profile or identifying characteristics of terrorists exist.

### Causes of Radicalization and Violent Extremism

U.S. Intelligence and law enforcement agencies focus on identifying and implementing measures to counter violent extremism, as directed by President Obama in the National Security Strategy. President's CT and CVE strategies aimed at disrupting the potential terrorist threats by attacking the root cause of terrorism. However, identifying the root cause of terrorism is difficult and challenging as it is uniquely different from person to person. The U.S. federal government has not properly addressed the root cause of terrorism. There are many theories of terrorism and the causes of terrorism. Some have linked terrorism with socioeconomic grievances, poverty, lack of education and psychological issues. However, studies show that it is not possible to extrapolate a definitive root cause for radicalization or violent extremism.

### Environmental or Societal Grievances

Some studies examine links between radicalization and environmental or societal grievances. Studies of European Muslim communities show that Islamic radicalization

occurs when Muslim immigrants fail to assimilate to Western society. Second and third generation Muslim immigrants suffer from an “identity conflict” because of perceived discrimination and a sense of marginalization. These individuals search for meaning and sense of community makes them receptive to radical ideologies. Radical Islamists use their ideology of forming a unified global community of all Muslims as a means to recruit alienated individuals by providing them with an alternative sense of identity and community (Roy 2004, 20).

### Social Mobility

Psychological and sociological research studies on terrorism show that radicalization is directly dependent of the social dimensions or interactions within a society. Social Movement Theory (SMT) and network theory explain that role of group interactions and social norms can facilitate or hinder the radicalization process. Social networks and group interaction within a community can use mechanisms such as bonding, bullying, peer pressure, or indoctrination to facilitate the participation of an individual in the collective action of the group. Marc Sageman, Rex Hudson and other social scientists conducted studies that indicate that the majority of individuals join a group due to personal connections (Sageman 2008; Hudson 1999).

Social studies indicate that the radicalization process and the motivation to join a terrorist group stems from feelings of victimization, despair from their loved ones’ future, a chance to elevate personal status in own society, and need to defend their own way of life and faith. Studies indicate that terrorist groups recruit people in religious places such as mosques, schools, social media networks, and or prison. The study of secular and Islamist terrorist by different social scientists such as Hudson, Sageman, Klausen,

McCauley and Moskalenko, and Vidino have overlapping facts supporting this in their findings.

Political advisors believe that societal conditions can give rise to radical ideologies that lead to violence and terrorism. Terrorists typically originate from rather average families, from communities with a perceived victimization sentiment, and from communities that exude a shared hatred towards a particular enemy (the West or America). Terrorist organizations typically recruit potential candidates through social venues and expose them to indoctrination through religious, social, and family ties. Jails and prisons present unique environment as they typically serve to bolster the commitment of recruited terrorists during confinement.

### Ideology

Ideology is a set of beliefs that drive and inspire behaviors. Throughout the literature reviewed, some experts believe that ideology is the primary driver for radicalism. Numerous studies attempt to explain the role of ideology in the radicalization process. Marc Sageman, a forensic psychiatrist and expert in al-Qaeda, posits that an ideology can provide a framework for individuals to express their personal experiences or opinions and act on them in a collective action. Roy Oliver and Quintan Wiktorowicz suggest that people radicalize when presented with an ideology that explains and validates the person's perceived grievances. Additionally, Jytte Klausen's research indicates that the promotion of an ideology is largely dependent on the credibility and charisma of the leader or person propagating the ideology (Klausen et al. 2010, 4). Ideology plays an important role in the radicalization process, however, as McCauley and Moskalenko suggest in their studies, having a radical ideology does not necessarily drive



people to violent extremism. Violent extremism is the result of the combination of motivation driven by radical ideologies, the means, and the opportunity to carry out the act (McCauley and Moskalenko 2014, 70-73).

### Islamism

Islamism is a political project to establish an Islamic state based on the principles of Islam. The beginning of Islamism traces back to the writings and teachings of Islamic extremist ideologues such as Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Osama bin Laden who justified their ideas from Islamic thinkers such as Taqi ad-Din Ahmed ibn Taymiyya. The principal tenets of their ideology include: the rejection of all other government systems not based on the Quran, the Sunnah (deeds and words of the Prophet), and the Hadith (traditions of the Prophet); the imposition of absolute sharia law; the legitimacy of offensive and defensive jihad against kafir (infidels); the use of violence against 'apostate' Muslim governments; and the concept of takfir (to excommunicate or declare as unbelievers) whereby extremists legitimize violence against Muslims who do not agree with their version of Islam; and the return to the caliphate (pan-Islamic state) like that of the seventh century under Mohammed's successors. Islamism is a political movement to bring about a desired change in government to establish one Islamic state.

To provide context to the evolving threat of Islamism, one must understand the historical background of the political movement. After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, a schism between Sunnis and Shias occurred: Sunnis recognized the Mohammed's successor as an elected representative. The Shiites recognized that only a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad could be caliph. Both branches developed their own version of authority structures according to Islamic principles. The desired

consensus for single leader of the *umma* (Islamic community) never materialized, hence a continuous power struggle began that has not ceased.

The first ideologue, Taqi ad-Din Ahmed Ibn Taymiyya, argued against the established 'apostate' Muslim governments in the 14th century and declared jihad to redirect the path of the Islamic world. Because the Muslim Mongol rulers did not adopt pure sharia law, Taymiyya argued they were acting contrary to the Quranic text and, in *jayiliyya*. Therefore, called for jihad and open warfare against the invaders (Habeck 2006, 19).

The events that set in motion the dynamics for modern Islamic extremist ideology revolve around the abolition of the caliphate in 1924, the creation of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, and the foundation of Saudi Arabia in 1932. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire created a power vacuum in the *umma* while Imperialism and Westernization became influential within the Muslim world. The shock of foreign ideas and forced negotiations, which coincided, with the noticeable decline of Muslim power in the region again stirred extremist thought. Two Egyptian Islamic extremist ideologues who spoke out against these developments were Hassan Al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb (Habeck 2006, 26-29). Hassan Al-Banna founded an Islamic ideological party known as the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Banna sought to unite and mobilize Muslims against Western cultural and political domination as well as against secular Muslim regimes, especially the Egyptian government, perceived as Westernized and secular. The Muslim Brotherhood's objectives sought to initiate a social renewal based on Islamic values, the implementation of sharia law, and force the withdrawal of foreign occupation. Al-Banna advocated a progressive and gradual re-Islamization through charity and education. Many

Muslims regard Al-Banna as the founding father of the Sunni branch of electoral Islam (Gaub 2014, 2).

Similarly, Sayyid Qutb envisioned and inspired a re-Islamization movement. Influenced by Al-Banna and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Qutb was a prolific ideological writer and his books provide much of the foundation for contemporary Islamic extremist philosophy. Three ideas stand at the heart of Qutb's extremist ideology, including: advocating pure sharia (servitude to God) against any system where there exists a separation of church and state; articulating the concept of Islam (submission to God) versus *jayiliyya* (living in ignorance of God); and arguing for the legitimacy of jihad against 'apostate' Muslim governments and against those who did not heed the call to "true" Islam; his own vision of Islam (Gaub 2014, 2).

Al-Banna and Qutb symbolize the "two factions which have dominated the re-Islamization movement since the 1950s: the progressive/electoral versus the revolutionary/terrorist approach" (Gaub 2014, 2). Qutb's philosophies influenced the next generation of Islamic extremists, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Osama bin Laden. However, whereas Al-Banna's and Qutb's animosity toward apostate rulers and the West was primarily due to secularism in the Muslim world and European domination, Zawahiri and bin Laden were further radicalized by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Afghan-Soviet war, and the presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia.

Osama bin Laden, the founder of al-Qaida, dates his own radicalization to 1973, the year of the Yom Kippur War (Lawrence 2005, 31). In 1980, he arrived in Peshawar, Pakistan near the Afghanistan border to organize the flow of funds and equipment to the mujahedeen who were fighting against the Soviet Union and the Soviet-backed Afghan

government. Due to his success in those efforts, he subsequently founded al-Qaeda. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia and was critical of the Saudi government for allowing the basing of US troops in Saudi Arabia.

In August 1996, bin Laden issued a fatwa, or a declaration of war, against the Americans occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places, a reference to the US troop presence in Saudi Arabia and two holiest sites, Mecca and Medina. In September 1996, the Taliban captured Kabul and eventually the majority of Afghanistan. Taking advantage of the Taliban's success, bin Laden established a safe haven from which to organize fighters for the defense of Islam (Lawrence 2005, xi-xv). Bin Laden viewed the reasons for the current conflict as a continuation of a historical struggle or "Crusade" by the West against Islam. He argued that the US's 2001 attack on Afghanistan was the latest in a long series of aggression against Islam dating back to the division of the Islamic world by European powers after World War I.

The views of Taqi ad-Din Ahmed ibn Taymiyya, Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and Osama bin Laden served as the foundation of today's political Islam, both revolutionary and electoral Islamism. Revolutionary Islamism began to take off with Ayatollah Khomeini's call for the overthrow of the Gulf monarchies and the claim of Iranian supremacy over all Muslims (Gaub 2014, 3). Actual attempts to overthrow the Saudi regime, the Bahraini, and the assassination of Egypt's President Anwar Sadat in 1981 by Islamic jihad proved the revolutionary Islamism was a threat to Arab regimes (Gaub 2014, 3).

In response to the revolutionary Islamism threat, Arab regimes repressed their populations, engaged in sectarian war of words against Iran, co-opted certain 'moderate' Islamist groups, and encouraged young men to fight against communist occupation (Gaub 2014, 3). Bin Laden took advantage of the Soviet withdrawal, presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia and the invasion of Kuwait, and established al-Qaeda or 'the base.' Volunteers who fought against the Russians in Afghanistan were now training in Sudan, Yemen, and Somalia as part of al-Qaeda. Revolutionary Islamist terrorist attacks conducted by groups like al-Qaeda, Ansar al-Sharia, Islamic State, and other became a global phenomenon from 1998 onwards (Gaub 2014, 3). Although, they differ in tactics, these groups employ terrorism in an attempt at triggering an up-rise of the Muslim population against their local regimes. What began as an attempt to re-assert Muslim authority ended up as terrorism and led to the most spectacular attack of all time, the 11 September 2001 World Trade Center attacks.

### Islamist Extremism

One of the believed causes of terrorism is Islamist extremism. This is why US policy focuses on countering the narrative of al-Qaeda and radical Islamism. Islamist ideology is a powerful and effective tool because it uses text from the Quran to justify and validate its legitimacy. An ideology based on religion and ethnocentric traditions is more likely to appeal and resonate with people who are seeking a sense of belonging and community. Jihadism is a radical Islamist ideology that sometimes inspires people to violent extremism or terrorism. This radical ideology cannot be defeated through military means alone. Islamic extremism is not a spiritually inspired ideology that is competing for power, better economic, social, and financial incentives. Instead, Islamic extremism is

an ideology aimed at destroying the current order and completely replaces it with another, an Islamic State based on Islamic political and religious principles (Phares 2008, 33).

### Current U.S. CT Strategy

The blurred lines between terrorism and insurgency groups present difficulties in developing and implementing effective counterstrategies. Similar to warfare, most scholars define terrorism as an act of violence used to achieve a political objective. Military theorist, Clausewitz defines war as “the continuation of politics by other means” (Clausewitz, 87). In this case, the “other means” is terrorism. The controversy lies in determining if terrorism classifies as a form of warfare or criminal violence (Lynn 2008, 319). This distinction determines how a government responds to terrorism and the type of counter measures it deems necessary to defeat terrorist threats.

Categorizing terrorism as either a form of warfare or a criminal act is difficult because the definition of terrorism varies widely depending on perspective and cultural values. Terrorism like war, is the “result of matters of conviction” (Lynn 2008, 319). The perpetrators of terrorism are often non-state actors. Terrorists are individuals, usually motivated by radical and extreme ideologies that operate outside the law and within sovereignty seams (Lynn 2008, 319). The nature of terrorism and the diversity of its perpetrators make it difficult to identify the adversary and figure out whom to target. In fighting terrorism is hard to define the threat and determine proper countermeasures to defeat it. Due to the difficulty in assessing how best to fight terrorist threats, U.S. policy has evolved over time. Prior to 9/11, the U.S. did not have a specified counterterrorism policy. Post 9/11, however, the U.S. announced its Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) formulated by a preemptive approach on terrorism in the Middle East. In 2008, the U.S.

implemented a new CT strategy that consisted of a direct approach to isolate, destroy, and defeat the enemy and indirect approach to create a stable Global Environment and set conditions inhospitable to violent extremism.

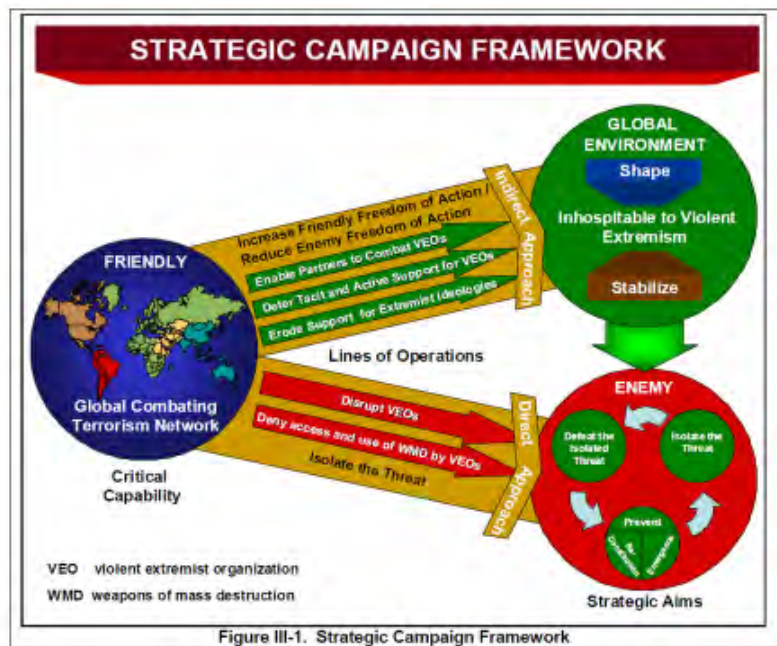


Figure 1. U.S. Strategic Campaign Framework

Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-26, *Counterterrorism* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014).

The current U.S. CT strategy reflects President Obama’s goal to “rebuild relations with the Muslim mainstream, marginalize violent extremists and deprive them of popular support, strike hard at terrorist networks and their havens and undermine extremist narratives” (U.S. White House 2011a). The U.S. CT strategy identified radicalization as a significant threat. The strategy focuses on engaging Muslim communities worldwide by building relationships by focusing on mutual interests and addressing issues of shared

concern. The CT strategy focuses on developing and implementing programs designed to undermine extremist narratives and isolate violent Islamic extremists (jihadists); assist other countries where the socioeconomic conditions are poor and the population is vulnerable to radicalization; and assert the international community that the U.S. is not at war with Islam.

Additionally, the CT strategy consists of kinetic counterterrorism measures such as the increase of drone strikes; intelligence led operations to capture, kill or disrupt terrorist networks and deny safe havens through direct military actions. Finally, the CT strategy states that the US is committed to working within the rule of law to “recapture America’s Global legitimacy and moral authority, to counter narratives of American hypocrisy” and legitimize the campaign against violent extremism (U.S. White House 2011a).

According to the President of the Council on Global Security, Katherine Gorka, President Obama based his policy on the Social Movement Theory. The policy focuses on the factors that may potentially create the right conditions for a person to radicalize. Gorka equates focusing on the “upstream causes” as being ill and treating only the symptoms. President Obama’s paradigm for defining terrorism fails to counter the ideology behind acts of violent extremist terrorist groups. It “condemns the United States to perpetual war” (Gorka 2014, 1).

### Summary and Conclusions

The literature review reveals the controversy in defining the term *terrorism*. This dissonance goes beyond just semantics. The different opinions and variations of Terrorism have unfortunately had an impact on national security. The review of national



security documents and existing literature show a lack of precision in terms, definitions, directives, and strategy. The majority of case studies, open source documents, and government reports reveal contention over counterterrorism policy; some believe the lack of success is due to a systemic and deliberate rejection of planning for the ideological component for terrorism.

This chapter summarized the sociological and psychological conditions of terrorism. It provided a brief overview of terrorism and reasons for why an individual would radicalize and conduct violent acts against innocent people. It also reviewed the U.S. counterterrorism measures that are currently in place to counter the ideologies propagated by al-Qaeda and groups alike. The literature review serves as the basis for providing contextual information and contemporary thought. The next chapter, chapter 3, will describe the methodology used for the presentation and analysis of the case studies and supporting data.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction.

The purpose of this study is to answer the primary research question, “Do the current U.S. Counterterrorism effectively address adversaries that are motivated by radical ideologies such as Jihadists ideologies for the future?” After the attacks of 9/11, policy makers acknowledged that radical Islamism ideology served as a common factor that linked these acts of terrorism (Gorka 2014, 4). Today, Islamist extremist inspired terrorism continues to pose a threat to the international security. Chapter 2, Literature Review, discussed the complexities faced in examining and studying the interactions of terrorism and counterterrorism. This study will use qualitative and quantitative analysis to understand the relationship between radical Islam and terrorism, and examine the effectiveness of the U.S. CT Strategy in regards to extremist ideologies.

#### Research Question

The primary research question for this thesis is “Does the U.S. Counterterrorism (CT) Strategic approach effectively address adversaries driven by radical ideologies such as Jihadists ideologies for the future?” In order to answer this question,

1. What is the U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy?
2. What are radical ideologies? What fuels/causes the appeal of this radicalism?
3. Who are the adversaries driven by these ideologies?
4. What are the challenges/threats of the future from these adversaries?

These questions provide the parameters necessary to structure the research, collection, and analysis of unclassified and open source documents, U.S. Congressional reports, and collection of written articles, videos, and magazines published by al-Qaeda, ISIL and their affiliates.

### Research Methods and Design

The research design of this study will use qualitative and quantitative methodology to examine the if the current U.S. CT approach effectively addresses the root causes of terrorism. In this undertaking, the step-wise approach includes a thorough literature review, defining operational terms and the construct of the current national counterterrorism strategy, defining the groups and major players, and selecting and analyzing case studies and government reports representative of the research question.

### Data Collection, Processing, and Analysis

This thesis uses textual analysis to compare and contrast a list of resources pertaining to the national strategies to combat terrorism, radical Islamist, and violence as a means to propagate political action and violent movements. Private and government reports selected provide analysis on the radicalization process, violent Islamist extremist group's strategy, and ideology. These reports will help to determine the effectiveness of the current U.S. security strategies regarding radical ideologies by examining the expansion of violent radical Islamist ideologies, number of Islamist groups and terrorist plots or attacks since 9/11.

### Methodological Approach

This study will use step-wise approach research supported by qualitative and quantitative analysis to answer the secondary and primary research questions. The data collection, processing, and analysis for this study will follow in the following steps:

Step 1: The first step in the research design will be to conduct a literature review of publicly available documents to answer the first secondary question: “What is the U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy? The literature will assist in the development of general themes and examination of the current U.S. CT Strategy and objectives. Table 1, below will illustrate the analysis of step 1.

Table 1. Analysis of U. S. National Security Strategies Criterion

	<b>Ends, Ways, Means, Limitations, And Threat</b>
<b>Strategy</b>	<b>End State:</b> The set of required conditions that defines the organizations’ overall objective. <b>Ends:</b> Objectives: “what” is to be accomplished to contribute to strategic end state <b>Ways:</b> Programs: explain “how” the ends are going to accomplish the objective <b>Means:</b> Resources used to accomplish the objectives; tangible or intangible means <b>Limitations:</b> Factors that interfere with the achievement of the desired objectives <b>Threat:</b> Adversaries, state and non-state actors and drivers of instability

*Source:* Developed by author.

Step 2. The second step in the research design will be to define radical ideologies and compare leading theories of studying and defining terrorism to address secondary question number two: “What are radical ideologies?” Additionally, this step will identify the most common agreed upon root causes of radicalization.

Step 3. The third step in the research design will examine case studies and government reports to address the second part of secondary question 2: “What

fuels/causes the appeal of this radicalism? The case studies were chosen due to their focus on Islamist ideology and radicalization. The selection of al-Qaeda is because it is known as a Salafi-Jihadist group that threatens international security. The case studies chosen for this study are:

1. Many Paths to Muslim Radicalization: American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat. A Congressional Research Service report developed by Jerome P. Bjelopera in 2013.
2. A Persistent Threat: The Evolution of al Qaeda and Other Salafi Jihadists. A study from the RAND Corporation, developed by Seth G. Jones in 2014. This case study will serve to analyze the history, capabilities, ideology, and strategy of al-Qaeda and its affiliates.

Step 4. The fourth step in the research design addresses the third and fourth secondary questions. The analysis of the reports and case studies to identify the adversaries driven by radical ideologies and identify the challenges of the future from these threats. In addition to information extrapolated from Chapter 2, Literature Review, analysis of the selected case studies will identify the strategy, capabilities, and overall threat al-Qaeda, its affiliates and allies pose to the U.S. homeland and interests overseas. Table 2 depicts the criteria and results of this step.

Table 2. Strategy of Violent Islamist Extremist Groups Evaluation Criterion

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Violent Islamist Extremist Groups</b>
<b>End State</b>	The set of required conditions that defines the organizations' overall objective
<b>Ends</b>	Objectives: "what" is to be accomplished to contribute to strategic end state
<b>Ways</b>	Programs: explain "how" the ends are going to accomplish the objective
<b>Means</b>	Resources used to accomplish the objectives; tangible or intangible means
<b>Threat to U.S.</b>	High (Active plotting against U.S. domestic and international targets); Medium (Active plotting against U.S. targets overseas); or Low (Limited or no plotting against U.S. targets)
<b>Ideology</b>	A set of beliefs that can either lead to radicalization and/or terrorism

*Source:* Developed by author.

Step 5. The fifth step in the research design will synthesize the facts and observations from compiled and analyzed data on the number and activities of violent Islamist extremist groups. The effectiveness of the current U.S. National CT Strategies will be determined by examining the number of Salafi-Jihadist groups, attacks by al-Qaeda and affiliates from 2007-2013 from the selected case studies, and the number of homegrown violent jihadist attacks from 2001-2013. Table 3 depicts the evaluation criteria for effectiveness.

Table 3. Effectiveness Criterion

<b>EFFECTIVENESS</b>								
<b>US CT Strategy</b>	<b>Incidents</b>			<b>Social Acceptance</b>				
	Attacks or plots	Attacks or plots against US targets	Attacks or plots against Foreign targets	Attacks by Muslim Converts ‘Lone Wolf’	Salafi-Jihadist Groups	Foreign Fighter Support	Public support to phone and internet monitoring	Attacks or Plots thwarted due to Informant
<b>GWOT 2001-2008</b>								
<b>CVE 2008-2013</b>								

*Source:* Developed by author.

Step 6. The sixth step in the research design is to answer the primary research question based on the results of the research.

Step 7. Based on the answer to the primary research question, step seven in the research design is to provide conclusions and recommendations.

### Threats to Validity

The primary threat to validity within this study pertains to construct validity. The challenges posed in objectively defining the terms that relate to the effectiveness of strategies involve a subjective interpolation of factors regarding cost-benefit analysis. The results of iterative actions/counteractions that could potentially escalate the conflict from the levels demonstrated within the case studies could test the validity of this research in the future. Precise language that attempts to explain an outcome on multiple levels rather than assess the effectiveness or failure of these actions will mitigate this potential threat. Additionally, archival research is fallible and subject to human error.

Another threat to this study pertains to the lack of a common definition for many of the key terms used throughout this study, e.g. terrorism. As many of the authors and experts who contributed to the literature review define terrorism through many different lenses, the perspectives of those authors reflect biases that require assessment for viability. The absence of common definitions results in potential content validity.

### Summary and Conclusions

This chapter discusses the methodology for the undertaking of the research study. The study will use qualitative and quantitative analysis to develop and compare data from multiple resources such as private and government reports, press and academic articles, and books written by experts and scholars. A seven-step-wise approach, this thesis will analyze the sources of radicalization and violent Islamist extremism, the threat to U.S. homeland and interests overseas pose by al-Qaeda, and will examine the effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of the current U.S. CT strategy. Having outlined the methodology of this study, chapter 4 will next present the data and trends assessed in the final analysis of this research study.



## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION OF FACTS AND ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to answer the primary question, “Is the U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy to address adversaries driven by radical ideologies for the future effective?” Chapter 3 outlined the research methodology and steps of data analysis used to answer the primary and secondary research questions. The analysis posited in this chapter divides into seven distinct steps. This analysis will serve to answer the secondary research questions. The information deduced by answering these secondary questions in each phase will aggregate to answer the primary research question and prepare the final findings and conclusions for chapter 5.

#### Facts and Analysis

The first step of the research design consisted of the compilation and analysis of data derived from academic research in the fields of political and military science, history, security and counterterrorism policy. Due to the complexity of the concept of counterterrorism and the threat addressed by the U.S. counterterrorism strategy, this section addresses many of the subcomponents of the overarching concept as a means to compartmentalize each component before addressing the whole. To this end, this section will discuss the strategies used to derive the U.S. CT strategy, the root causes of terrorism, radicalization, the threat posed by radicalization to the U.S., and analysis of the U.S. response to such threat.

### What is the U.S. CT Strategy?

This step of the research design builds on the point described in chapter 2, Literature Review, and further describes the U.S. CT Strategy answering the first secondary research question. As such, this step further refines the U.S. CT objectives and defines how the U.S. attempts to achieve these objectives by incorporating all elements of national power to combat terrorism at home and abroad. A review of the theoretical basis for this policy also explains the approaches used as means to deter and defeat terrorist threats.

The U.S. CT strategy is an all-encompassing approach nested within the National Security Strategy involving all elements of national power. The national elements of power are Diplomacy, Information, Military, and Economy. These elements of national power are included in the development of all strategies as the means.

Table 4. Element of National Power

<b>Diplomacy</b>	Global Muslim engagement; building partnerships with Muslim communities based on “common interests beyond counterterrorism”.
<b>Information</b>	Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) efforts to undermine al-Qaeda’s narrative and avoiding perceptions that the U.S. is at war with Islam
<b>Military</b>	Provide direct military action to capture, kill or disrupt terrorist networks; intelligence and security support to host nations; kinetic counterterrorism measures
<b>Economy</b>	Provide financial and economic support to partnered states to build host nation’s security efforts and sustain CT campaign against violent extremists

*Source:* Developed by author based on data from the U.S. CT Strategy dated 2011.

The objective of the U.S. CT Strategy is to defeat violent extremism and shape the global environment, creating conditions inhospitable to violent extremism. The CT

Strategy intends to accomplish this objective by utilizing all four elements of national power to bolster global Muslim engagement, counter Violent Extremism (CVE) messaging, execute focused CT measures, and follow the rule of law to regain and support the U.S. legitimacy and moral authority as seen below.

In order for the U.S. security and counterterrorism strategies to be effective and mitigate or prevent an attack to the homeland, the strategy should properly address the ends, ways, means, and properly define the threat. Political and law enforcement officials identify the sources of violence that threaten the U.S. homeland and national interests as violent Islamic extremism propagated by al-Qaeda and its affiliates.

Table 5. Analysis of the U.S. National CT and CVE Strategies

	<b>ENDS, WAYS, MEANS, LIMITATIONS AND THREAT</b>
<b>US CT Strategy 2011</b>	<p><b>ENDS:</b> Prevent, isolate and defeat the enemy; Shape and maintain a global environment inhospitable to violent extremist organizations</p> <p><b>WAYS:</b> Direct Approach: Disrupt and eliminate Safe havens, Degrade Links between al-Qaeda and affiliates,</p> <p>Indirect Approach: Building security partnerships, building a culture of resilience, balancing security and transparency, upholding the rule of law, diminish drivers of violent extremism</p> <p><b>MEANS:</b> Military, Intelligence Community, Law Enforcement; allies, diplomacy, development, strategic communications, private sector</p> <p><b>LIMITATIONS:</b> Broad objectives, and vague guidance</p> <p><b>THREAT:</b> Al-Qaeda and homegrown Jihadist</p>
<b>US CVE Strategy 2011</b>	<p><b>ENDS:</b> Prevent violent extremists and their supporters from inspiring, radicalizing, financing, or recruiting to commit acts of violence</p> <p><b>WAYS:</b> Support and coordinate efforts to understand violent extremism; assess threats posed at national and local level; support non-governmental, community-based programs; strengthen relationships with communities; support local law enforcement; disrupt and deter recruitment to extremist organizations; leverage existing models</p> <p><b>MEANS:</b> Law Enforcement Agencies; Intelligence Community</p> <p><b>LIMITATIONS:</b> Vague and it does not address the root cause of radicalization and recruiting; Does not assign a lead agency; risk of alienating significant elements of the population</p> <p><b>THREAT:</b> Homegrown Terrorism inspired by foreign threat groups</p>

Source: Created by author based on U.S. National Government documents.

Social Movement Theory (SMT) forms the basis for the current U.S. CT Strategy. SMT addresses al-Qaeda and other violent extremist groups as “activists” acting to improve legitimate grievances, poor socioeconomic conditions, oppressive states, and violations of human rights and civil liberties. The strategy has two approaches: a direct approach based on a threat-based model and an indirect approach based on a criminal justice framework. The direct approach views terrorism as a form of unconventional warfare while the indirect approach views acts of terror as criminal violence.

The direct approach is an enemy centric approach that uses military forces as the primary means to combat terrorism. The objective of the direct approach is to defeat, destroy, and dismantle the enemy through military actions such as drone strikes, offensive operations, increased intelligence, and security support operations. The effectiveness of a direct approach is easy to measure as it produces an immediate total of captured or killed, however, the use of military force, or hard power, raises questions on the ethics and legality of the methods used to conduct this approach.

The indirect approach builds upon the criminal framework of counterterrorism and is dependent on the use of soft power by employing all other elements of national power. The indirect approach to counterterrorism focuses on the population and root causes of terrorism. The objective of the indirect approach is to shape the global environment to create conditions that prevents and erodes support for extremist ideologies. The indirect approach involves countering the enemy’s narrative and promoting American values by developing security partnerships and promoting political, social, and economic reform. The effectiveness of the indirect approach is difficult to measure because experts admittedly do not truly understand the root causes of terrorism;

as such, any preventative or preemptive measure taken may not actually address the actual root causes of terrorism.

This section answers the secondary questions of “what is the U.S. CT Strategy?” by discussing the U.S. CT Strategy. To achieve these objectives, the U.S. uses a multi-faceted methodology to incorporate all pillars of U.S. national power: diplomacy, information, military action, and economic aid. This utilization of these diverse resources enables the U.S. to combat terrorism and counter violent extremism using both direct and indirect approaches. Direct approaches consist of both military action and support to foreign security forces, while indirect approaches consist of economic, social, and political measures aimed to educate and address potential catalysts used to motivate radical ideologies.

#### What are radical ideologies?

Step two of the research design consists of defining radical ideologies and determining the root causes of violent extremism or terrorism. Radical ideologies refer to any radical belief espoused by an individual or group (what kind of a group?). While these beliefs, in and of themselves, do not constitute a direct threat, these ideologies do provide motive for an escalation in violent activity. This step will describe the radical ideologies used specifically by al-Qaeda and other al-Qaeda affiliated adversaries as well as linkage between ideology and violent acts.

Al-Qaeda is an Islamist, Salafi-Jihadist, organization. Salafism describes a revival or renewal of pure Islamic principles as originally outlined by the Prophet Mohammad. Some experts define this form of Islamism as a social movement to pursue the fundamentals of religion (Hudson 1999, 161). However, due to the Islamic principles

outlined by the Prophet Mohammed, this social movement encapsulated more than a religious movement but also a synchronized political and judicial movement.

Al-Qaeda's Salafi-Jihadist ideology sets the model for all Muslims to follow the literal version of the Quran, worship practices, piety and conduct. They believe that the modern day Islam is corrupt and they must restore its purity. This ideology describes today's Muslims as being in a state of ignorance, *jayiliyya*. Al-Qaeda like groups encourage a political-military campaign to overthrow a government to allow adherence to the principles of Islam and prevent the return of the Muslim community to *jayiliyya*. Most Salafi-Jihadist emphasize the importance of a caliphate based on sharia to emphasize the importance of the oneness of God, *tawid* (Jones 2014, 13). Salafi-Jihadists view violent jihad as a personal responsibility for Muslims to support the movement in contrast to traditional Islam which teaches that jihadism is a communal responsibility to defend the Muslim community.

As previously mentioned, an individual's espousal of Islamism does not specifically predicate that individual's turn to violence as a means to achieve that belief. As described in chapter 2, most experts believe that a radicalization of this ideology provides the link between ideology and the decision to commit acts of violence or terror as a means to recognize a political, social, and religious objective. Radicalization is a dynamic and inherently personal process driven by a combination of environmental conditions and personal motivations, manifesting in strong feelings and beliefs regarding a particular issue (McCauley and Moskalenko 2014, 70). Therefore, violent radicalization or violent extremism stems from the manifestation of strong beliefs into behavior.

In summary, al-Qaeda and its affiliates have a firm belief in the renewal or revival of conservative, extreme Salafi-Jihadist principles. The full embodiment of this ideology, or Islamism, comprises of the revival of religious, political, social, and judicial frameworks on a macro level. While Islamism, in itself, does not call for violence, the radicalization of this ideology by organizations and individuals results in the use of violence and terror as one of the means to achieve the ideology.

### Case Study Analysis

The third step of the research design addressed specific case studies in order to answer the secondary question: “What fuels/causes the appeal of this radicalism?” Case studies and reports about extremist or terrorist movements were useful in increasing knowledge and understanding of the threat to U.S. domestic and international security interests. Since September 11, 2001, private and governmental institutions and organizations published numerous studies discussing terrorism, most often focusing on radicalism and violent extremism, including homegrown jihadists. The research and all figures for the number of al-Qaeda-inspired terrorist plots and attacks, foreign fighter support and support alliances quoted in this paper derived from the selected case studies listed below.

#### Case Study 1: “Many Paths to Muslim Radicalization”

This study from Congressional Research Service defines “homegrown violent jihadist” terrorist and describes the plots and attacks perpetrated within the United States or abroad by American citizens, legal permanent residents, or visitors who radicalized primarily within the U.S. (Bjelopera 2013, 2). The study provides an analysis of domestic

terrorism attributed to violent extremists inspired by radical Islamist or Jihadist ideology by examining 63 plots occurred since 9/11. Additionally, this report discusses the efforts of government and security agencies to build a trustworthy partnership between community groups and local law enforcement officials as well as potential challenges they may face through the process (Bjelopera 2013, 25).

Bjelopera illustrates an increase of homegrown Jihadist terrorist plots or attacks in the United States suggesting that radical Islamist extremist ideologies influence some Americans (Bjelopera 2013, 1). The report posits that individuals “become terrorists by radicalizing and then adopting violence as a tactic” (Bjelopera 2013, 2). Radicalization is the transformation of mainstream beliefs to extremism due to the exposure to radical ideologies (Bjelopera 2013, 11). Radicalization differs from violent extremism in that, according to the report, radicalization depicts interests in radical ideologies and violent extremism refers to the enactment of violent beliefs. Bjelopera defines radicalization as “the process of acquiring and holding radical, extremist, or jihadist beliefs” and violent extremism as the “violent action taken” on behalf of the radical beliefs (Bjelopera 2013, 12).

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Intelligence and Analysis “indicate the radicalization dynamic varies across ideological and ethno-religious spectrums, different geographic regions, and socio-economic conditions” (Bjelopera 2013, 12). The report states that key factors such as the Internet, social networks, intermediaries, and to a lesser extent, prisons drives the radicalization process (Bjelopera 2013, 13). Intermediaries consist of charismatic leaders or extremist clerics that propagate radical ideologies and recruit for terrorist organizations. Social networks are



central to the radicalization process. Social networks help create and strengthen intimate kinship ties, friendships, and social relationship. Social networks are key to the radicalization process by placing “extreme ideologies into context of an individual’s personal grievances” (Bjelopera 2013, 19). The Internet blurs international borders and lines between messenger and audiences encouraging individuals to join, support, participate, and form a broader jihadist movement (Bjelopera 2013, 21).

Bjelopera’s analysis of homegrown jihadists’ plots exhibited differences in individual’s objectives, less than 50-percent showed interest in conducting suicide attacks, and the operational capabilities of varied greatly. Based on his analysis, Bjelopera makes recommendations to counter radicalization and violent extremism such as developing closer relationships between law enforcement officials and American Muslim communities whilst striking a balance between security and liberty.

#### Case Study 2: “A Persistent Threat”

A Persistent Threat: *The Evolution of al Qa’ida and Other Salafi-Jihadists* is a study, by Seth G. Jones from the RAND Corporation, about the history, capabilities, and strategy of al-Qaeda and its regional affiliates. This report examines the study and evolution of al-Qaeda and affiliates. The report uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative data to gauge the state and number of al-Qaeda-like groups, referred to as Salafi-Jihadists, their capabilities, levels of violence, and the threat these groups may potentially pose for the United States government, domestic security, and international interests.

Jones argues that the number of Salafi-Jihadist groups with an Anti-American ideology, “Al-Qa’idism” is growing and poses a serious threat to the United States (Jones

2014, ix, 40-43). Jones research shows a 58-percent increase of Salafi-Jihadist groups within a three-year period, from 2010 to 2013 (Jones 2014, 26-27). Additionally within the same time-period, there was an increase in the number of attacks conducted by al-Qaeda affiliated groups. These attacks mostly targeted the “near enemy,” governments, regimes, and opposing insurgencies in the Middle East and North Africa (Jones 2014, 34-38).

Al-Qaeda’s central and self-radicalized individuals pose a “high threat” to the United States because of their capability to attack U.S. targets within the homeland and overseas. Other Salafi-Jihadist groups pose a “medium threat” to the U.S. because they are only focused on the “near threat” and lack the will and capability to attack U.S. targets (Jones 2014, 41).

Jones concludes the report by recommending a framework which includes the development of long-term security partnerships with countries where there is a “High” threat to U.S. interests (Jones 2014, 53-55). In addition to long-term security partnerships, Jones posits the pursuit of host nation partnering with countries where the threat to U.S. interests is “Medium” (Jones 2014, 55-57).and finally, an “offshore balancing” in countries where the threat is “Low” (Jones 2014, 58-59).

#### What fuels/causes the appeal of this radicalism?

Having discussed radical ideologies, this step further discusses how the U.S. defines the factors that cause radicalization. While scholars and U.S. policymakers believe that the radicalization process is a collective action driven by political, social, and environmental conditions, the true reasons are unknown (Gorka 2014, 10). The two primary theories that the U.S. government has attempted to base CT strategies on are the

Rational Choice Theory (RCT) and the Social Mobility Theory (SMT). These theories provide a framework by which President Bush and President Obama understood and created a response to terrorism.

The RCT argues that terrorism is a rational and calculated strategic decision taken by rational actors to achieve a political goal (Crenshaw 2008, 26). Defining the threat within a context allowed the Intelligence Community to profile potential adversarial groups and specific individuals meeting the profile. This specificity enabled the development of regional strategies to combat specific potential motivators that assisted in predictive analysis and proactive deterrence.

The SMT, however, explains radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism as extreme expressions of legitimate grievances. Similar to the RCT, SMT is useful in identifying and predicting behaviors but “dismisses the idea and beliefs that inspire terrorists to act” (Gorka 2014, 11). Instead, President Obama’s keystone theory focuses on environmental conditions rather than the actual threat. While this theory attempts to focus on the macro environment, the conditions outlined as contributing factors exist everywhere and present little in the means of refining threat identification.

According to the research, the most lauded cause of terrorism, is radicalization that occurs at the micro level. Radicalization is the espousal of radical beliefs. While radicalization, in itself, does not lead to violent actions, combined with the right conditions, motivations, time, and opportunity, radicalization can lead to terrorist activity. Most terrorists, in this case synonymous with violent extremists, share the following characteristics: personal grievances, usually due to a perceived sense of marginalization, socially slighted, a feeling of not belonging, perceived discrimination and alienation of

the group; psychological issues including depression or suicidal tendencies; and personal loss or crisis in life, such as divorce, loss of employment, etc. Radicalization serves to describe an individual's reception of radical ideas as well as their willingness to serve what they consider a higher purpose, reflecting the political ideologies of their recruiting agent. An individual's sense of marginalization, coupled with exposure to radical ideology, and group associations lead to violent extremism or terrorism.

#### Who are the adversaries driven by these ideologies?

The fourth step in the research design was to analyze the reports and case studies to identify the adversaries driven by radical ideologies. Al-Qaeda and its affiliates are organizations comprised of individuals themselves called radical Islamists or violent Islamist extremists. To understand these adversaries, one must understand the objectives of the organization as well as the characteristics of the individuals.

Al-Qaeda and other Salafi-Jihadist groups are a decentralized network that can be categorized into four tiers: al-Qaeda central in Pakistan, sworn allies in Yemen, Syria, Somalia and North Africa; other Salafi-Jihadist groups that have not yet sworn alliance to al-Qaeda but have the same objectives; and self-radicalized individuals and networks within Western countries to include the United States (Jones 2014, 10). Despite the increase of al-Qaeda-inspired groups, the decentralized structure utilized presents a vulnerability that counter-terrorists can exploit to dismantle and defeat the al-Qaeda network.

Analysis of the case studies cross-referenced with data from the literature review identified and examined the capabilities and strategy of al-Qaeda and other violent

extremist group. The table below details the analysis of al-Qaeda and other violent Islamist extremist group's grand strategy.

Table 6. Grand Strategy of Violent Islamist Extremist Groups

<b>STRATEGY</b>	<b>Violent Islamist Extremist Groups</b>
<b>End State</b>	A Global Caliphate
<b>ENDS</b>	Radically transform the Islamic World and set conditions to create a global Muslim community based on Sharia and Quranic Law.
<b>WAYS</b>	Neutralize the Far Enemy Defeat Near Enemy Mobilize the Masses
<b>MEANS</b>	Polarized social/cultural differences Funding from Charitable organizations Terrorist attacks Decentralized network
<b>Threat to U.S.</b>	Al-Qaeda and self-radicalized Islamic Extremists pose a “High” threat to the U.S. homeland and interests abroad.
<b>Ideology</b>	Radical Islamism: Islamic Extremist (Salafi-Jihadist).

*Source:* Developed by author. Data derives from the selected academic terrorism-related literature and selected case studies.

Al-Qaeda's strategy is to establish a global caliphate and for Islam to be victorious over all other religions in the world. To achieve this goal, al-Qaeda and affiliates are trying to set the right conditions by provoking the West or “far enemy” through terrorist attacks and attempts at polarizing the community through an extensive propaganda. Other groups such as ISIS focuses on the “near enemy” attacking to overthrow local government, and to establish a regional caliphate. The extensive propaganda is designed to recruit support for their movement.

Salafi-Jihadists or violent Islamist extremists believe that “society should be governed by Islamic law based on the Quran and adhere to the model of the immediate

followers and companions of the Prophet Muhammad, and the will to conduct violent acts to achieve their goal” (Bjelopera 2013, 5). Followers may simply believe this in accordance with their Muslim faith, but the existence of large modernists Muslim populations fully integrated into a globalized world belies that violent Islamist extremists certainly form a minority within the Sunni population. However, violent Islamist extremist groups continued to recruit and expand influence within the Middle East, increasing 58-percent within a three year period from 2010 to 2013 (Jones 2014, 26-27).

This sudden rise in recruitment does not spawn from a sudden realization by the mass populace that radical Islamism is the answer but rather addresses the needs of a particular faction of the populace susceptible to radicalization. A large population of unmarried, lower class males, in the Middle East, provides a hotbed for radical extremist recruitment. Radical Islamists use their ideal of forming a unified global community of all Muslims as a means to recruit alienated individuals by providing them with an alternative sense of identity and community. Marginalization from society, a desire for belonging to a community, a hope for future prosperity drives the radicalization of these individuals.

While the U.S. currently attempts to negate this rising threat through soft power-focused programs, lethal military action can sometimes negate these actions by instilling fear and mistrust within the local populace. Violent Islamist extremists are non-state actors who do not recognize nationality as their primary allegiance. Extremist groups use propaganda blaming the grievances of the region on the Western world. As a result, economic efforts conducted in support of the government of Iraq, for example, do not

receive recognition by Iraqi national radical Islamists; however, overt U.S. military drone strikes in Yemen reflect a perceived regional conspiracy against Islamism.

In summary, Salafi-Jihadists differentiate from other rebels, militants, guerrillas, insurgents or freedom fighters in their tactics, their organizational structure, and their global appeal. Unlike most nationalist or separatist movements, Islamists express geopolitical grievances shared by people in many nations. Their organizational structure also differs from traditional intra-state militants. Al-Qaeda operates like a franchise, establishing associations with kindred groups, providing various levels of support. This organization reflects a global plight rather than a regional goal.

#### What are the challenges/threats of the future from these adversaries?

With the adversary defined and the recognition that radical Islamists continue to grow in number, this step discusses the challenges and threats posed by radical Islamist extremists to the U.S. and the world. This discussion addresses both the environments in which al-Qaeda and its affiliates will attempt to interfere as well as the challenges the U.S. will encounter in interdicting this interference. This step also discusses potential challenges presented by the U.S.'s adherence to the current CT strategy.

The continued escalation of violent Islamist extremism will continue to challenge and threaten U.S. domestic and foreign interests. The expansion of these groups will create a broadening competition for resources in third world and emerging countries, conflicting both with the U.S. indirectly as well as directly with the local nations in which these groups operate. Radicalized extremists will also threaten regional security throughout the world, continuing to threaten the existence of Israel as well as secular

democratic institutions and other entities that do not align with their concept of a global Muslim community based on Sharia and Quranic Law.

The U.S. will continue to combat radical groups of this nature unless the U.S. can determine a strategy that addresses both the U.S.'s current realities, i.e. a limited budget and a drawn-down military force, and the root causes of these adversarial groups' ideologies. A cohesive strategy must leverage all resources available and must provide a consistent message, succeeding in not furthering to fuel the propaganda campaigns of Islamist extremists.

The collateral damage caused by drone strikes and U.S. military raids hinders the success of the U.S. CT indirect approach by inciting fear and mistrust within the affected populace. The direct approach, as demonstrated by drone strikes in Yemen or the U.S. backed Ethiopian overthrow of the Somali Islamist transitional federal government in 2007, only propagates every negative perception the populace within those regions have of the U.S. The indirect attempt to build and educate and the direct approach to destroy and neutralize do not provide a consistent message, especially to those Muslims who identify themselves more closely with their religion, clan, or tribe than their national identity.

In the wake of a decade marked by such a high scale of direct military action, a shift in strategy relying solely on soft power may take years to recognize. However, economic and financial aid programs provide the best chance at a lasting improvement of conditions. These measures will erode the factors upon which these radicalized groups build their base of support.



In conclusion, the U.S. will continue to face a growing violent extremist threat as data supports that these adversarial organizations continue to expand, recruit, and grow. These violent extremist organizations will leverage the environmental conditions existent in third world countries and emerging nations to find safe havens and threaten U.S. and U.S. allies' interests abroad.

### Data Aggregation

To assess the effectiveness the current CT strategy fully, one must consider the strategies beyond the theoretical understanding. This step serves to aggregate the data collected and analyzed in the previous steps of the research design methodology.

The U.S. CT strategic goals is to deny safe havens and marginalize terrorists or potential terrorists in order to prevent the spread of radical ideologies. Coincidentally, marginalization is the one root cause of terrorism identified in all studies and research of terrorism. In addition to experts identifying marginalization as a root cause of terrorism, individuals and communities fuel radicalized and violent extremism by the loss of a love one or personal property. Al-Qaeda and affiliates take advantage of the collateral damage done by U.S. drone strikes fueling people's anger and feeling of vengeance to join and support al-Qaeda's cause.

This step serves to aggregate data collected the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) and information gathered from the case studies to assess the effectiveness of the U.S. CT Strategy. To determine if the U.S. CT strategic goal to defeat, destroy and dismantle al-Qaeda and its affiliates and radical Islamist extremist ideology, the following data points were examined: number of Salafi-Jihadist groups from 1998-2013; the number of attacks

by al-Qaeda and affiliates from 2007-2013; and the number of homegrown violent jihadist attacks from 2001-2013.

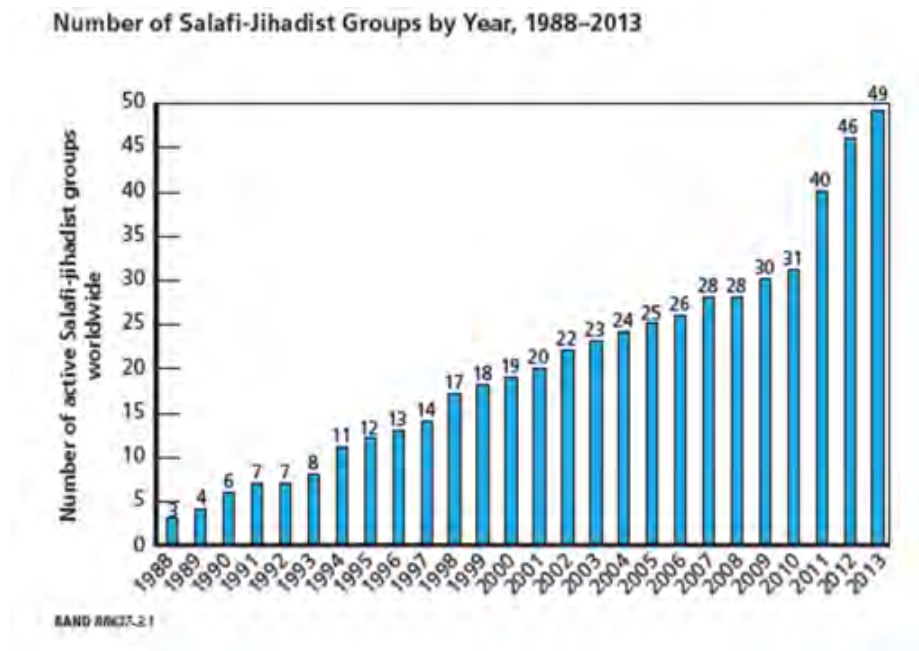


Figure 2. Number of Salafi-Jihadist Groups by Year, 1988-2013

Source: Seth G. Jones, *A Persistent threat: The Evolution of al Qaeda and Other Salafi Jihadists* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2014), 27.

Figure 2, Number of Salafi-Jihadist Groups by Year, 1988-2013, illustrates that despite successful operations in capturing or killing al-Qaeda leadership and dismantling the terrorist network, al-Qaeda and its affiliates increased the number of affiliates and operational reach. In 2001 there were 20 known Salafi-Jihadist groups which doubled by 2011. Today, there are approximately 48 known Salafi-Jihadist groups. The increase in groups indicates that the U.S. CT strategic approach to al-Qaeda and violent Islamist extremist groups is not effective.

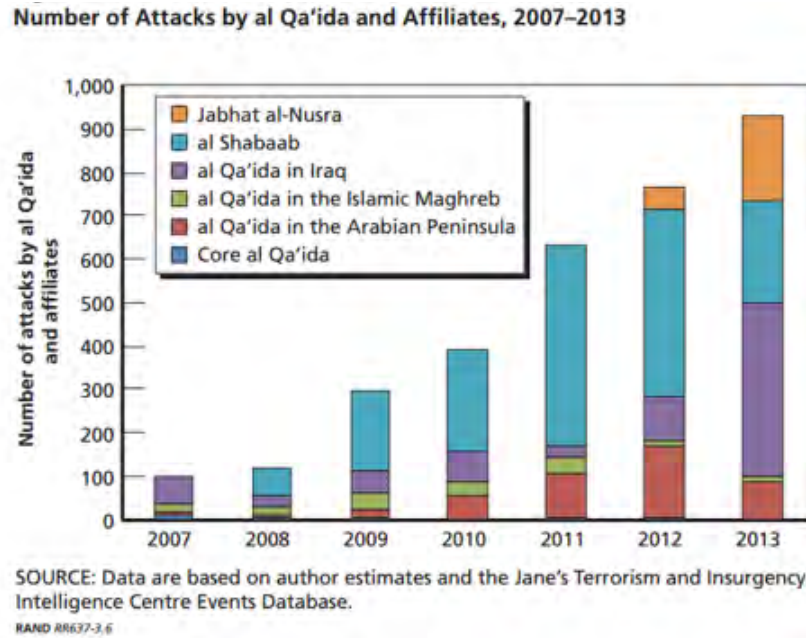


Figure 3. Number of Attacks by al-Qaeda and Affiliates, 2007-2013

Source: Seth G. Jones, *A Persistent threat: The Evolution of al Qa'ida and Other Salafi Jihadists* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2014), 35.

Figure 3, Number of Attacks by al-Qaeda and Affiliates, 2007-2013, illustrates that despite successful operations in capturing or killing al-Qaeda leadership and operations geared to deny safe havens and defeat al-Qaeda and the number of attacks continues to increase. In 2007, there were approximately 100 attacks per year. There was an increase of attacks from 2009 to 2013. Al-Qaeda's ability to propagate its ideology can also be attributed to the Internet and social media, and the increase of military operations to include drone strikes in the Middle East. The increase in attacks conducted by al-Qaeda and affiliates indicates that the U.S. CT strategic approach to al-Qaeda and violent Islamist extremist groups is not effective.

U.S. CT Strategic approaches to countering violent extremist ideologies were assessed by examining the number of plots and attacks conducted by self-radicalized individuals during the time period of 1998-2013. The table below, table 7, reflects open source gathered factors pertaining to the homegrown violent jihadist terrorist acts or plots occurring between 2001 and early 2008, listed under GWOT, and late 2008 through 2013, listed as CVE. The extrapolation of the numbers of terrorist attacks conducted by radical Islamists from September 2001 to December 2013 assists in determining the effectiveness of U.S. counterterrorism efforts and the counter violent extremist strategy.

Table 7. Analysis of U.S. CT and CVE Strategy: Effectiveness

<b>EFFECTIVENESS</b>								
<b>US CT Strategy</b>	<b>Incidents</b>			<b>Social Acceptance</b>				
	Attacks or plots	Attacks or plots against US targets	Attacks or plots against Foreign targets	Attacks by Muslim Converts 'Lone Wolf'	Salafi-Jihadist Groups	Foreign Fighter Support	Public support to phone and internet monitoring	Attacks or Plots thwarted due to Informant
<b>GWOT 2001-2008</b>	21	15	7	12	28	1,000	65%	14
<b>CVE 2008-2013</b>	43	27	18	23	50	20,000	62%	31

*Source:* Developed by author. Data derived from the case studies and the Global Terrorism Database (GTB) at the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START).

Table 7, illustrates that despite successful operations in capturing or killing al-Qaeda leadership and dismantling the decentralized network utilized by the organization, al-Qaeda and its affiliates have increased attacks and plots against the United States. However, the number of attacks thwarted due to informants has also increased. This fact

is important to note as it suggests both education of the threat as well as denotes a strong relationship between citizens and law enforcement agencies. This suggested relationship demonstrates that the public does not share the same radical ideologies and that communities are less willing to condone terrorist activities.

However, terrorist attacks increased since late 2008. While the positive aspect of this table suggests that the U.S. capability to thwart attempt attacks is consistently successful and the American public supports for the methods used, the rise in terrorist activity is rather alarming. This increase may be the result of increased military action in Iraq and Afghanistan, a delayed response to U.S. forces directly combating al-Qaeda organizations. A terrorist response, utilizing unconventional methods in response to U.S. actions, would correspond to the increase in percentage of roughly 400% more attacks against U.S. targets. This response could also correspond with a rise in attacks conducted by Salafi-Jihadists, foreign fighters, and plots against foreign targets directed against Host Nation and Coalition partners.

However, this table also reflects an increase of al-Qaeda activity since the CT strategy changed from GWOT (RCT based) to CVE (based on the Social Movement Theory (SMT)). The increase in attacks may reflect a response to the U.S.' increased employment of drone strikes to deny safe havens, strikes that further isolate the adversary. As discussed previously in chapter 2, one of the reasons why individuals radicalize and turn to terrorism is because they feel marginalized from society. This increased number of attacks query whether the utilization of soft power combined with a direct approach is effective and when the fruits of those labors will show.

The issue with the above query as to the effectiveness of the current U.S. CT Strategy becomes muddled as the U.S. currently employs two approaches at the strategic level to address the issue of terrorism. By attempting to use both a direct and indirect approach, the effects of one negate the other. The U.S. State Department's Coordinator of CT writes that America must address the complex factors of radicalization and "confront the political, social, and economic conditions that our enemies exploit to win over recruits and funders by increasing foreign assistance to nations and communities where violent extremism has made inroads, such as Pakistan and Yemen" (Rinehart 2010, 45). This view reinforces the perspective that America can effectively address its terrorism problems by changing the conditions on the ground. The U.S.'s current strategy attempts to both directly combat al-Qaeda militarily and attempts to address local socio-economic conditions through economic aid. The methods utilized to combat al-Qaeda, i.e. drone strikes, alienates the population who also suffer. While these drone strikes do target high ranking adversaries, the threat to the populace directly negates any positive effects those strikes may have. Instead, terrorist organizations take full advantage of the conditions improved by U.S. soft power economic stability efforts and capitalize on the discontent sown by acts of war.

In summary, data aggregates of the secondary research questions and the data extrapolated from the case studies suggests that the U.S. will not see the fruits of the SMT-based indirect approach when direct actions clearly contradict those efforts. The direct approach, as utilized in Yemen and Ethiopia, only propagates every negative perception the populace within those regions have of the U.S. The indirect attempt to build and educate and the direct approach to destroy and neutralize do not provide a

consistent message to those who do not view their identity strongly in terms of nationality. The U.S. should focus on supporting a direct approach conducted by local law enforcement at the tactical and operational level. Combating terrorists directly with local law enforcement will preserve the effects and military information support operations of the soft power efforts while reinforcing the capability of local law enforcement to protect the populace.

### Primary Research Question

The sixth step in the research design is to answer the primary research question based on the results of the research and analysis. The primary research question of this thesis is “Does the U.S. Counterterrorism (CT) Strategy effectively address adversaries driven by radical ideologies such as Jihadists ideologies for the future?” The analysis suggests that the answer is “No.” The U.S. cannot effectively address the root causes of radicalization adopted by the current CT strategy and strategically conduct direct military action to achieve peace and security. Direct military actions such as drone strikes and raids to capture or kill leaders of terrorist organization can contribute to the narrative and propaganda of extremist groups. Collateral damage from these operations instill fear and mistrust between the local populace and the government.

### Summary and Conclusions

This chapter analyzed the U.S. CT strategy and data gathered to answer the primary research question. The author concludes that the current U.S. CT strategy does not effectively address adversaries driven by radical ideologies for the future. The U.S. use of strategic military force in a direct approach negates the effects of the soft power programs

developed to address the root causes of terrorism as suggested by SMT, the theory upon which the strategy defines the adversary. Chapter 5, Conclusions and Recommendations, will further address this conclusion and recommendations of this analysis.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to answer the primary research question: “Does the U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy effectively address adversaries driven by radical ideologies such as Jihadists ideologies for the future?” Chapter 4, Presentation of Facts and Analysis, described the analytical results and the aggregation of the data regarding key components of al-Qaeda and affiliate groups and homegrown violent jihadist attacks to determine that the U.S. CT strategic approach is not effective to defeat al-Qaeda or other adversaries that are motivated by radical ideologies. Considering that al-Qaeda is the leading advocate of Salafi-Jihadist ideologies and multiple open source documents report that al-Qaeda is weakened, it was unexpected to see the increase in attacks, affiliated groups and self-radicalized individuals. As a result assessing the strength and capabilities of al-Qaeda and affiliates can serve as a measure to assess the effectiveness of the current U.S. CT Strategy. This study used qualitative and quantitative analysis to examine the root causes of radicalization and terrorism, the U.S. CT strategic approaches to al-Qaeda, and number of groups, attacks, and homegrown violent jihadist threat as outlined in Chapter 3, Research Methodology. Using the objectives of the U.S. CT Strategy, this study examined al-Qaeda’s actions as representative of the group’s capabilities against U.S. CT measures to assess the effectiveness to the U.S. CT Strategy regarding radical ideologies. This chapter discusses the conclusions of the study and provides recommendations on how to improve the U.S. CT Strategy.

## Conclusions

This thesis concluded that the current U.S. CT Strategy does not effectively address adversaries driven by radical ideologies for the future because it marginalizes and polarizes the population by deliberately conducting military operations and drone strikes to deny safe havens. The literature review suggested that the most commonly defined root cause of radicalization or terrorism is marginalization and a feeling of “us vs. them.”

Analysis suggests that the current U.S. CT Strategy does not effectively prevent terrorism nor counter radical ideologies that fuel terrorism. Instead, the U.S. CT Strategy’s goal to deny safe havens and marginalize terrorists or potential terrorists which coincidentally is the one root cause of terrorism common in all the findings of terrorism studies.

Marginalization leads to a sense of loneliness and drives people to radicalization and or violent extremism according to experts.

The current framework for the U.S. CT Strategy relying mostly on the Military as the primary means to combat violent extremism falls short of deterring terrorism and countering violent Islamist extremist ideologies. Al-Qaeda and other Islamist extremist pose a considerable threat to the U.S. and strategic interests through the propagation of their violent Islamist extremist ideology. The greatest risk to U.S. security is the threat of homegrown terrorism, self-radicalized individuals that adopt al-Qaeda’s ideology and focus on attacking the “far enemy.”

Countering violent radical ideologies is not only a Military effort but also needs the coordinated political, economic, information and social efforts. The common belief that CT is a war on the tactic of terrorism or a war on radical ideologies is incorrect. The Islamist movements are organized to seek control of territory and resources to build a

regional and then global caliphate. The U.S. CT Strategy identifies the enemy as a transnational terrorist network but fails to define violent extremism as a violent movement fueled and sustained by Islamist extremism and jihadist ideology. The ideological movement serves as validation for the organization, justification for their actions, and a tool to recruit.

The analysis suggests that the current U.S. CT Strategy attempts to address the known threat strategically through direct action while attempting redress the factors considered by many experts to be root causes contributing to the rise of violent extremist organizations. While incorporating both a direct and indirect approach would seem to be a logical approach in addressing both short term and long-term threats, the combination of the direct and indirect approach to terrorism serves only to negate the positive effects of the other. While many argue that a commitment to direct approach eradicates the immediate threat, data suggests that direct actions only raise extremist groups' negative attitude towards the U.S. and increases their ability to recruit and further propagate violent anti-American ideologies.

The threat of an imminent terrorist attack warrants a direct approach and application of "hard" power focused on the Military element of national power. However, the use of direct military action may prove to be futile in regards to countering or preventing non-state actors - adversaries living in third world countries, fueled by radical ideologies. However, the overwhelming use of American Military power to counter violent Islamist extremist organizations can be perceived as discriminatory and disproportional to the threat. This disproportionality in U.S. CT response fuels resentment and further polarization and isolation. Hence, it decreases the population's trust of the

U.S. government and increases radicalization and terrorism by creating the conditions necessary for violent extremism to thrive.

### Recommendations

Based on the conclusions there are a number of recommended actions that can strengthen the U.S. CT Strategy and continue to protect U.S. homeland and international interests. The U.S. CT and law enforcement officials can put more effort into understanding the history and components of the Salafi-Jihadist ideology in order to counter al-Qaeda's recruiting efforts. There must be a profound understanding of the ideology, the organization and their goals for using such extreme ideology and the targeted population to properly counter radical ideologies.

The U.S. should continue its commitment to implement and enforce the SMT-based CVE strategy and scale back lethal military actions when combating terrorism. Lethal military actions should be reserved for countries whose governments are not willing or committed to protect their citizen's civil rights and liberties, counter terrorism and violent extremism, and prevent violations of human rights.

Adopt a proactive approach to terrorism and avoid reactive policies by enhancing intelligence-gathering tools can thwart terrorist attempts. The U.S. Strategy should contain a robust and legitimate government surveillance program based on intelligence whilst avoiding singling out communities based on cultural or religious factors.

The U.S. government should re-evaluate the CT Strategy to ensure the direct approach of denying safe havens; decapitating al-Qaeda's network, and marginalizing alleged terrorist groups is not at odds with the indirect approach of promoting good governance and gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the local population. The direct

approach, use of lethal military actions, should be re-evaluated to ensure it does not blunt the efforts of the indirect approach and continue to fuel resentment and further polarization and marginalization. The U.S. government should consider implementing CT approaches, tailored to the target country that applied uniformly and evenly balanced all the elements of national power. U.S. security assistance partnerships can contribute to strengthening the local government's legitimacy in the eyes of the affected population.

The U.S. should be cautious when implementing the denial of safe havens as a strategy to defeat the enemy. One must take into account the second and third order effects. For example, can the host nation maintain the fight against the terrorist group? Moreover, for how long? Additionally, if terrain is denied, the terrorist group forced to go to other lands will create problems for a once peaceful society. Allowing the terrorist group safe haven within a particular area, preferable away from a crowded place, the government can then maximize human and signal intelligence and special operations. If counterterrorist forces know the location of the group, the process of surveillance and other capabilities become more feasible.

The international community should adopt one standard definition of terrorism honored by all countries regardless of cultural or religious context. Terrorism should be defined as an act of violence against innocent people (civilians, not government, law enforcement or military personnel). The reason or motif for such attack is irrelevant as an attack against innocent unarmed women and children is an act against humanity—a human rights violation. As such, counterterrorism should be a responsibility for the United Nations Human Rights Commission. Regarding the enforcement of the rule of law, terrorists should be prosecuted as common criminals. Governments should avoid

elevating the status of the crime by openly associating the act with political or religious motivations

The U.S. government should assign a lead office and establish a mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness of CT and CVE measures. The 2011 U.S. CT Strategy and its complementary documents, “Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States” should be updated based on assessments of the effectiveness of the current strategy. The updated strategy should assign responsibilities and direct action and resource investment for the program to be effective and support communities in protecting and strengthening security and civil rights and liberties.

Additionally, the U.S. government should promote education and invest in education programs for law enforcement officials and the CT community. Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) efforts rely heavily on well-informed and resilient local communities. Major cities like Boston and Los Angeles developed programs that integrate local religious leaders, health professionals, social service providers, and teachers to educate recruitment-targeted populations.

Finally, the U.S. can work with host nations to assist in providing venues for people to communicate their grievances regarding governance, education, economy, and the safety of the community. When governments provide a credible alternative to voice objections to existing policies and address community concerns, the argument for violent action is less compelling to the potential pool of extremists.

It is impossible to stop each threat or terrorist attack but in a free society committed to individual liberty, violence and the threat of terrorism can be countered as a community. “Democracy triumphed in the cold war because it was a battle of values between one system that gave preeminence to the state and another that gave preeminence to the individual and freedom.”

— Ronald Reagan, *An American Life: The Autobiography*, 1990

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